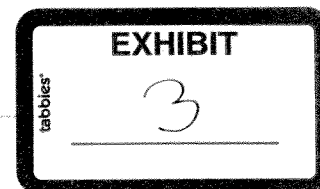

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News Release

11/01/2002



W.A. Drew Edmondson, Attorney General

Edmondson Says He'll Sue if Arkansas Breaks Talks

An Arkansas threat to end water quality negotiations did not stop Oklahoma from submitting phosphorus standard to federal environmental regulators, Attorney General Drew Edmondson said.

Oklahoma today submitted the new .037 phosphorus standard to the Environmental Protection Agency. The move Arkansas threatened would end current negotiations regarding water quality in Oklahoma rivers. Edmondson is concerned about damage to Oklahoma streams and lakes caused by wastewater from Arkansas municipal dischargers and the Arkansas poultry industry.

The attorney general is critical of Arkansas' heavy-handed approach and disappointed that the state employed to thwart submission of the standard.

"I told industry representatives at our July meeting in Little Rock that ongoing negotiations would prohibit Oklahoma from submitting the new phosphorus standard to the EPA," Edmondson said. "Arkansas later threatened to walk away from the table if we followed through with the new standards."

"Maybe they were bluffing, maybe they weren't," said Edmondson. "We will find out soon enough. We will not be threatened or intimidated."

Edmondson is disappointed that the Arkansas environmental agencies have failed to stand by Oklahoma in asking the poultry industry to clean up its act.

"These talks began with four sides at the table - us, Arkansas environmental agencies, Arkansas municipalities and the poultry industry," Edmondson said. "Now, the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality and the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission are apparently on their own with the industry. That just won't fly."

While the municipalities are stepping up to the plate, Edmondson said the industry's refusal to stop pollution caused by their disposal of chicken waste is a key sticking point in the negotiations. "The industry said chicken waste is the primary source of stream degradation."

"Oklahoma entered these negotiations in good faith," Edmondson said. "It was not easy to get the industry companies to the table. They apparently are unwilling to clean up their mess. I'm disappointed in the Arkansas agencies as well."

Edmondson previously said Oklahoma would not file a lawsuit as long as negotiations were ongoing. A lawsuit would seek to hold the poultry industry, not the individual grower, responsible for the environmentally safe disposal of the large volumes of waste generated at their facilities.

"If they walk, we have no alternative but to sue," Edmondson said. "Water quality is simply t
important."

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